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Older adults urged to get shingles vaccine

SARASOTA COUNTY —Even as health officials urge flu vaccinations, residents and seasonal visitors are also encouraged to get vaccinated against shingles. Caused by the same virus associated with chickenpox, shingles is more common and serious in older adults.

Health officials estimate that one in three people in the United States will develop shingles during their lifetime. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shingles most commonly occurs in people 50 years old or older, people who have medical conditions that keep the immune system from working properly, or people who receive immunosuppressive drugs.

For some, the blistering skin rash can lead to severe pain that can last for months or even years. Other complications of shingles include eye problems and, less often, pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness and brain swelling (encephalitis). In rare instances, shingles also can lead to death.

“After a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays in the body in a dormant state. For reasons that are not fully known, the virus can reactivate many years later, causing shingles,” said Dr. William Heymann, Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County medical executive director.

“The likelihood of getting shingles or experiencing severe and lasting complications is greatly reduced in those who get the shingles vaccine,” said Dr. Heymann. “Shingles vaccine is only needed once. You can get shingles more than once so it is advisable to get the vaccine even if you have had the disease. Those who have been vaccinated and then later get shingles usually have a much milder experience.” The vaccine, which is 60 percent effective in preventing shingles, has few, if any, side effects.

“Those who receive the shingles vaccine at the Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County may only be required to pay their co-pay if they have coverage for the vaccine through Medicare Part D. Be sure to bring your card with you so we can file the appropriate claim for payment,” said DOH-Sarasota’s Immunization Program Director Donna Keith.

The DOH-Sarasota offers adult vaccines, including the shingles vaccine, daily at its two Sarasota County locations.

For information or to make an appointment for a shingles vaccine, call 941-861-2900 in Sarasota or 941-861-3864 in North Port.

For more information, visit DOH-Sarasota’s website at www.sarasotahealth.org/services/immunizations-shingles.htm

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